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**From the Persepolis Fortification Archive  
Project, 1: An Old Persian Administrative  
Tablet from the Persepolis Fortification\***

**Unique items in the Persepolis Fortification**

**Archive** – The clay tablets and fragments that Ernst Herzfeld discovered in 1933 in rooms connected with the fortification wall at the northeastern corner of the terrace at

\* The research which led to the recognition of the document presented here was made possible by a Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies, 2005/06. An earlier version of these remarks was presented to the 217<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the American Oriental Society, San Antonio, Texas, March 2007. We are indebted for advice, comment and correction to Mark Garrison, Rüdiger Schmitt, and Ilya Yakubovich. Responsibility for errors of substance and judgment remains with the authors. Abbreviations: PF = Elamite Persepolis Fortification texts published in Hallock 1969; PF-NN = Elamite Persepolis Fortification texts cited from unpublished editions by Richard T. Hallock (not collated unless otherwise noted); PFS = Persepolis Fortification Seal, cited according to Garrison & Root 1998.



Persepolis included documents of three main kinds: tablets and fragments with texts in Elamite language, in cuneiform script, representing perhaps 15,000-18,000 original documents; tablets and fragments with texts in Aramaic language, in Aramaic script, representing perhaps 700-1,000 original documents; and tablets or tags with seal impressions but no discernible texts, representing perhaps 5,000-6,000 original documents. These were products of three strands of a single information system, now called the Persepolis Fortification Archive (see Jones & Stolper [forthc. a]).

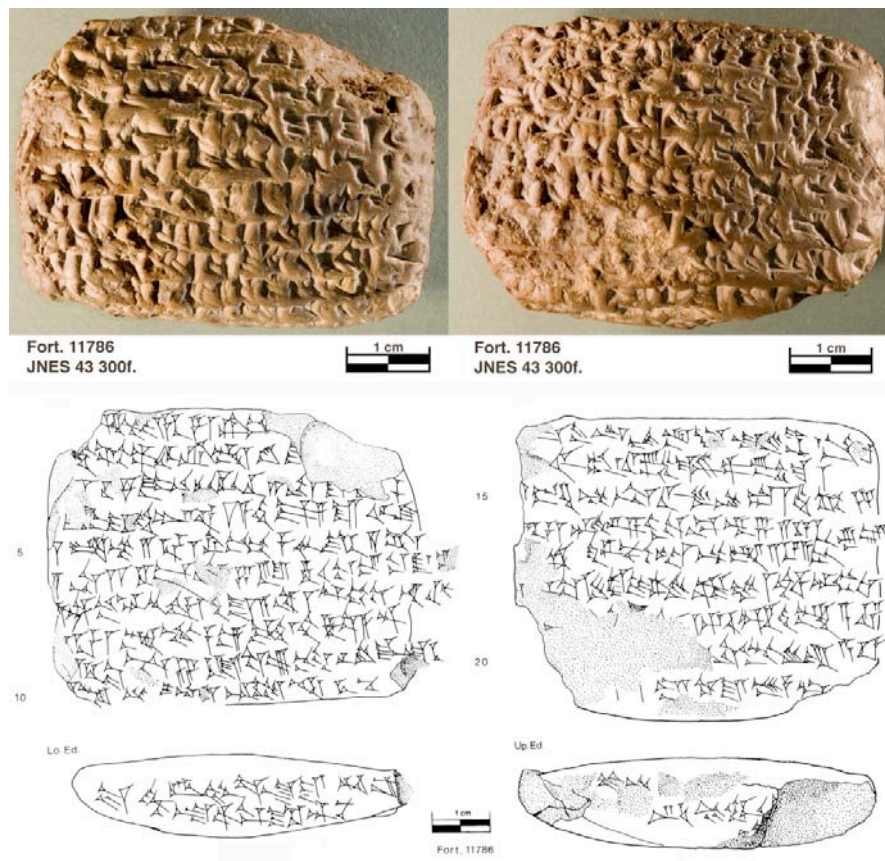
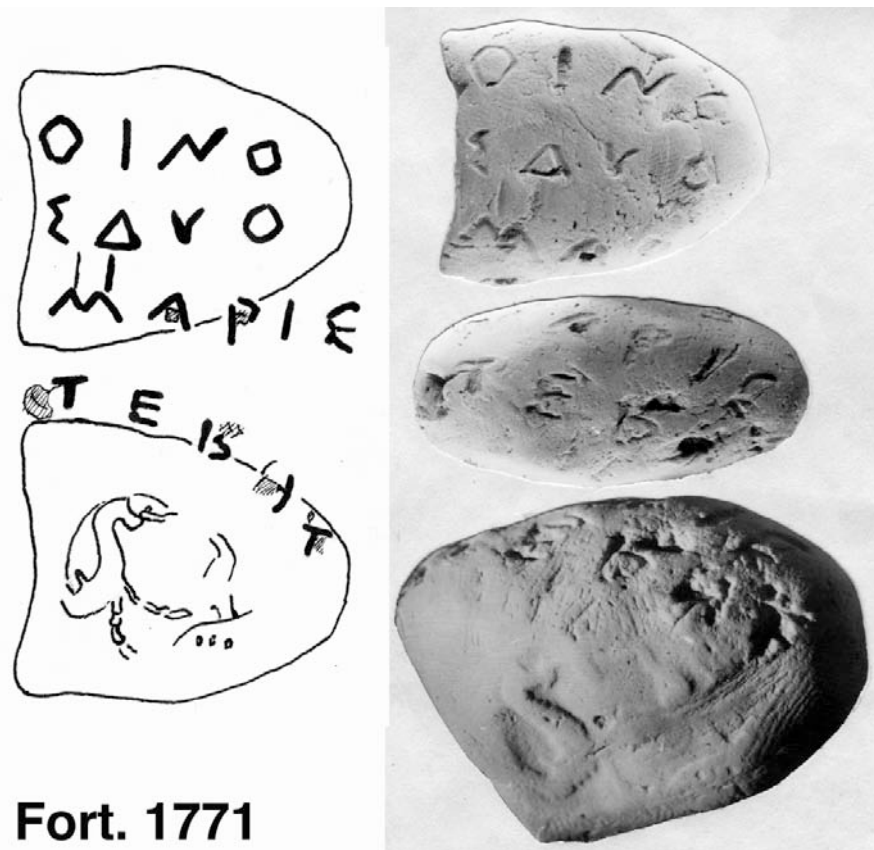


Fig. 1. Neo-Babylonian legal document from the Persepolis Fortification (Fort. 11786).



**Fort. 1771**

*Fig. 2. Greek administrative document from the Persepolis Fortification (Fort. 1771);  
copy by R. T. Hallock; Oriental Institute photographs.*

The Persepolis Fortification tablets also included some unique pieces: a Neo-Babylonian legal document, the record of a slave sale, written at Persepolis, but almost certainly extraneous to the Archive (**Fig. 1**; see Stolper 1984);<sup>1</sup> a clay tablet with a

<sup>1</sup> Extraneous because it is legal, not administrative, because it is recorded on behalf of the individual parties, not the institution, and because it shares no personnel, contents, or seal impressions with administrative documents of the PF Archive.



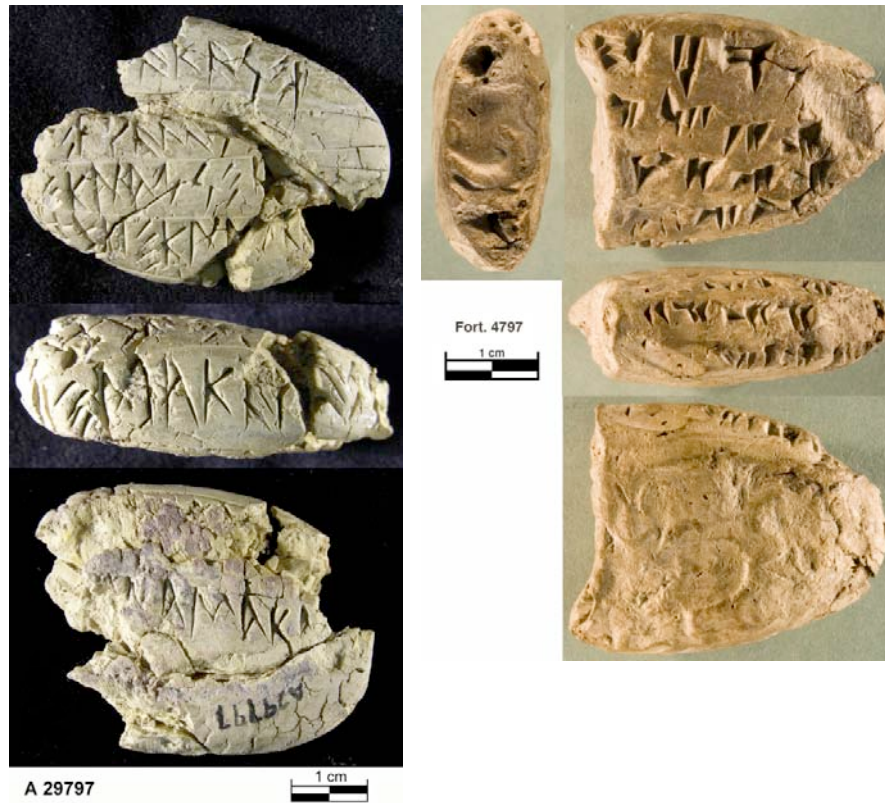
terse administrative text in Greek language and Greek script, not extraneous to the Archive, but part of the same system of information and recording (Fig. 2 and 3; see Hallock 1969: 2; Lewis 1977: 12f.; Balcer 1979: 279f.; Schmitt 1989: 303-305; Canali di Rossi 2004: 133);<sup>2</sup> a clay tablet with what appears to be Phrygian script representing a text in Phrygian language, thought to be “economic” but of uncertain relationship to the Archive (Fig. 4; see Brixhe 2004: 118-26; Friedrich 1965; Cameron 1933-34: 272); and a tablet with cuneiform characters that Hallock characterized as “enigmatic” – perhaps not a script at all, but appearing on an authentic, sealed tablet (Fig. 5).



Fig. 3. Fort. 1771.

- <sup>2</sup> Not extraneous because it bears a seal impression also found on Elamite Fortification tablets (PFS 0041: Garrison & Root 2001: 6), and because it deals with a small amount of wine, like some of the Elamite Fortification tablets.



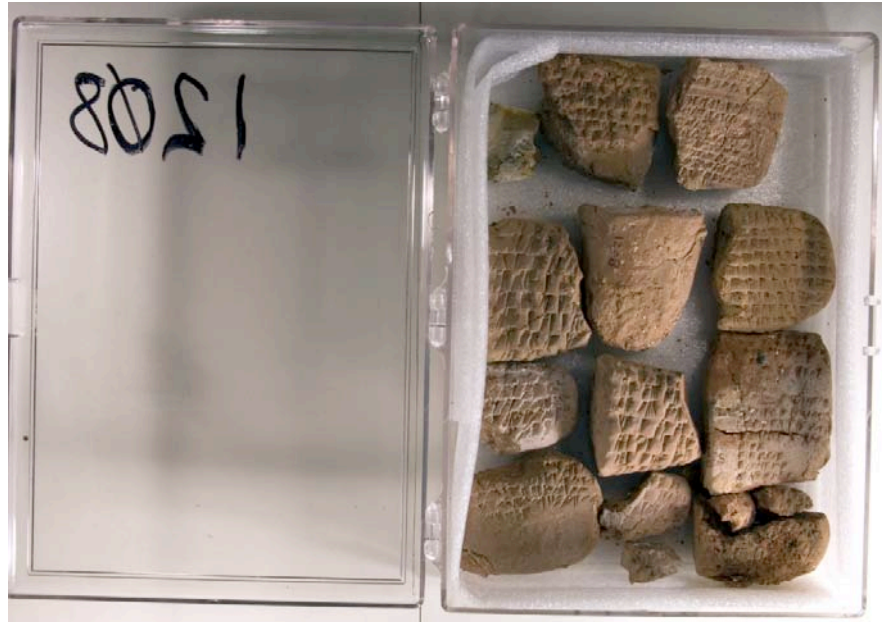


*Figs. 4-5. Phrygian(?) document (A. 29797) and tablet with “enigmatic” cuneiform script (Fort. 4797) from the Persepolis Fortification.*

**An Old Persian Tablet** – To these we can now add another extraordinary document. Like the Greek and Phrygian tablets it is not only unique (so far) among the Persepolis tablets, but also without contemporary parallel anywhere. Indeed, it actually contravenes stated expectations. It is a damaged clay tablet with Old Persian cuneiform script representing a text in Old Persian language, an administrative record (**Figs. 7, 8, 9**). In the reign of Darius I, at least one Persian in Persia wrote Persian language in Persian script and



expected someone else to know, if not how to read it, then at least where to file it.



*Fig. 6. Persepolis Fortification tablets, Box 1208.  
Old Persian tablet (Fort. 1208-101), second row, right.*

This assertion may seem to overstate the obvious, but it runs counter to a long-established consensus on Old Persian writing and language, that they were used for display and prestige purposes, but not for “practical” recording. A recent example is the statement that

The Old Persian language and script were used only for the king’s inscriptions, or else to identify objects or people connected with the king ... Old Persian ... was written with a script invented for these inscriptions and used for no other purpose. Old Persian writing and language together were not so much vehicles for communication among Persians as instruments for the great king’s display of his presence and power (Stolper 2005: 19f.).



*Figs 7-8. Old Persian administrative document from the Persepolis Fortification (Fort. 1208-101), obverse, lower edge and reverse.*

In this, as in other matters, Ilya Gershevitch took an extreme position in expounding his “alloglottography” thesis. Suggesting that between Darius I in 520 BC and Henry Rawlinson in 1846 AD, there need not have been more than eight and surely had been no more than twenty individuals who ever





read or wrote Old Persian (1979: 116), he insisted that “[he did] not see the slightest chance for Old Persian written in Old Persian script ... to have ever been in general use” (1979: 143). With different purposes and presumptions, Rüdiger Schmitt came to a similar point of view: “das Altpersische [hat] für die eigentliche Verwaltung dieses Reiches keine Rolle gespielt” (1993: 81; but see Briant 2003: 126 fn. 87). Prevailing characterizations of Old Persian language and script do not account for the existence of this solitary Old Persian tablet.

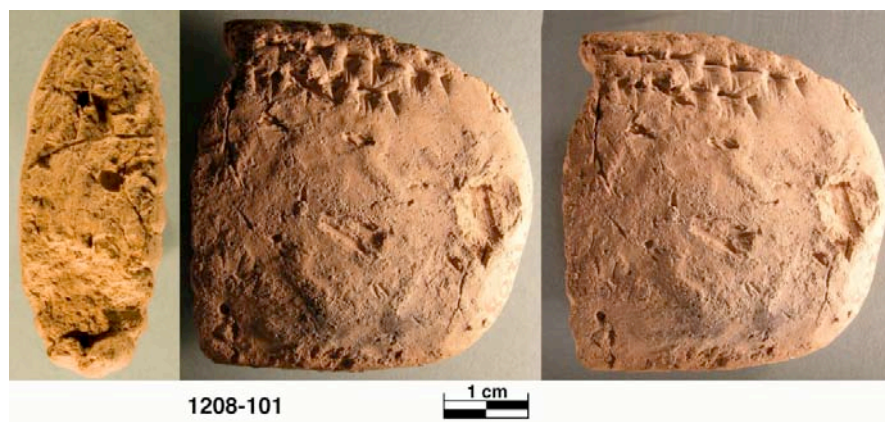


Fig. 9. Fort. 1208-101, seal impression reverse, left edge.

To find Old Persian on a clay tablet is not extraordinary in itself. Many manuscripts and fragments of DSe and DSf are written on clay, most conspicuously the main manuscript of DSf<sub>p</sub>, often exhibited and often illustrated. This is well known to anyone who has ever consulted the original editions or, for that matter, the bibliographical apparatus of Kent 1953. It must have been well known to Gershevitch when he said “so far no clay tablets inscribed in OP script have been found,” and spun his droll fantasy about the stone-carver at Bisitun flinging clay *Vorlage* off the cliff to shatter on the rocks below





and concluded “there is therefore quite a chance that throw-away clay fragments of OP versions of royal inscriptions may one day come to light” (Gershevitch 1979: 122).<sup>3</sup>

What is extraordinary is to find Old Persian in an administrative record, a “practical” text. It may not demonstrate general use of Old Persian, but even as an isolate it indicates wider use than previously supposed. The properties of this document, its contents, and the fact of its existence call for comment by those concerned with ancient Iranian philology, with language relationships in the Achaemenid Empire, and with ancient literacy.

### **Old Persian tablet among the Persepolis**

**Tablets** – The Persepolis Fortification tablets came to Chicago in 1936 in about 2,350 numbered boxes. Box 1208 contained twelve items (**Fig. 6**): seven were fragmentary Elamite cuneiform tablets in the tongue-shaped format most often used for primary records of single administrative transactions (texts of Categories A-S in Hallock’s typology); three were fragmentary Elamite cuneiform tablets in the rectangular formats used for secondary records, journals and accounts (texts of Categories V-W); one was a fragment of an uninscribed, sealed tablet; and the twelfth was the Old Persian

<sup>3</sup> This and other passages in the “alloglottography” article lead us to the surmise that much of it was meant not only as an amusement in its oral form, but actually as a parody of Iranian philology and epigraphy, to which some erudite notes and bitter criticisms were attached.



document, now numbered 1208-101.<sup>4</sup>

It may be surprising that none of the people who pored over the Fortification tablets during the seventy years since they were excavated recognized this extraordinary document sooner. Ernst Herzfeld had examined the tablets closely enough in the field that he recognized the Phrygian text before 1934 (Anonymous 1934: 232), but if he handled this tablet before it was packed for shipment to Chicago, the text may still have been obscured by dirt. There is no indication that any of the team at Chicago that worked with the Fortification tablets before 1941 checked Box 1208. Richard T. Hallock did not edit any items from the box, and he may never have looked into it. On the other hand, Abdol Majid Arfaee had many of the Fortification tablets baked for conservation and cleaning in the 1970's, including the cuneiform tablets from Box 1208, and a team led by Charles E. Jones in the early 1980's took all of the tablets out of the deteriorating cardboard boxes in which they had been packed after the excavation and moved them to corresponding stable plastic boxes. Both must have handled the Old Persian tablet after its surfaces were reasonably clean, but they must have perceived it as being so similar to the Elamite Fortification tablets that it did not call for special attention.

<sup>4</sup> Numbering conventions are explained by Hallock 1969: 1f. The PFA project now adds the expedient of assigning three-digit numbers to items from the numbered boxes (e.g., 0001-101), to avoid inadvertent duplication of numbers previously assigned by Hallock, Bowman, or others (e.g., 0001-1).



Indeed, seen at arm's length and among other tablets, the Old Persian document is not distinctive. In all physical respects the Old Persian tablet resembles Elamite Fortification tablets. It is a tongue-shaped tag, fitting easily into the palm of a hand, formed around a knotted string that emerged at the corners of the flattened edge. The text is laid out so that the flattened edge, now lost, is to the left. The uninscribed part of the reverse has at least two indistinct impressions of a cylinder seal. The seal scene is similar to ones found on many other Fortification tablets, but the seal is not specifically identified among Persepolis Fortification Seals.

The script is neat and clear. The characters are certainly Old Persian. The numeral 100 found in line 1 occurs in only one other known Old Persian text (as part of the numeral 120, Wc:1). Rüdiger Schmitt (personal communication) observes that the text conforms to Old Persian orthographic rules, notably in the writing of CV-V sequences (-*mu-u-*, line 2; -*tu-u-*, line 6), to which one can add the absence of a word divider between numerals and the following words (lines 1, 9, 13). The use of the character [ç] rather than [θr] indicates that the language is Persian rather than another Iranian dialect.

Most of the text is legible, but very little of the content is recognizable. It is not surprising to find little parallel in known Old Persian royal inscriptions or in Avestan scriptures. It is disappointing, however, to find little or no help in the Achaemenid Iranian administrative vocabulary preserved by



indirect transmission.<sup>5</sup> We know of no Middle Persian administrative records that are similar enough to be helpful.<sup>6</sup> We can offer plausible interpretations of only a few parts of the text.

### Text and commentary

Fort. 1208-101 (**Figs. 7, 8, 9**)

dimensions: *c.* (4.0 cm) W x 4.4 cm H x 1.8 cm Th

Baked after *c.* 1975.

#### Obverse

1. [ ... (x) + ] 600 + 4 *g-r*-
2. [*i-w* : ... ] - × - × - *h-r-mu-u-v*-
3. [ ... ] - <sup>⌈</sup> *t* <sup>?</sup> - *i-r* <sup>?</sup> <sup>⌋</sup> - *a-g* : *h-c*-
4. [*a* : ... ] - <sup>⌈</sup> *k* <sup>?</sup> <sup>⌋</sup> - *a-r-a* : *a-m-k-a*-
5. [ ... ] - *a* : *v-ç-k-a-u-v-a* :
6. [ ... ] × - *tu-u-k-a* : *t-m-r*-
7. [ ... ] - <sup>⌈</sup> *š* <sup>?</sup> - *y* <sup>?</sup> <sup>⌋</sup> - *a* : *k-a-r-i* - <sup>⌈</sup> *k-t* <sup>?</sup> <sup>⌋</sup> -
8. [ ... ] : *a-t-r* : *a-i*-
9. [ ... ] - <sup>⌈</sup> *i* <sup>?</sup> <sup>⌋</sup> - *y* : 5 *v-r* - <sup>⌈</sup> *d* <sup>?</sup> <sup>⌋</sup> -

#### Lower Edge

10. [*n-a* : ... ] × : *x-š-i-t* - <sup>⌈</sup> *h* <sup>?</sup> <sup>⌋</sup> - [ × ]

<sup>5</sup> That is, loanwords and transcriptions of Iranian words found in Achaemenid texts in non-Iranian languages. See Tavernier 2007.

<sup>6</sup> The glossaries of the Parthian administrative texts on ostraca from Nisa have not been enlightening.





Reverse

11. [ ... ]-𐎧𐎶𐎠-*a* : × - × - × - × - × - × -
12. [ ... ] 𐎠𐎶𐎶𐎠-*v-n-a-d-a* :
13. [ ... ×+]2 𐎠𐎶𐎠-*r*-*d-a* :

Two indistinct impressions of a cylinder seal, reverse: rampant lion, facing left of scene, attacking hindquarters of a stag walking toward left with head turned back toward attacker; farther left, another rearing animal, facing toward right but with head turned back toward left, away from attack.

1. *g-r*-[*i-w* ... ] = Old Persian \**grīva*- (Aramaic *grw*, Elamite *kurrima* [BAR]), measure of dry capacity? If so, then probably followed by indication of a commodity.
- 3f. If *hac*[*ā*], then [× (- ×)]-*kārā* is ablative, but if ordinary Old Persian orthographic rules apply, then this word is not a title ending in *-kara*, but perhaps a personal name ending in *-kārā*. If so, then this phrase perhaps corresponds to Elamite *kurmin* PN-*na*, ‘allocated by PN.’
5. *vaçakāuvā*: locative plural, to \**Vaçakā*-, perhaps a toponym connected with *vaça*-, ‘bow.’ Cf. GN Uššakampan, <sup>Δ</sup>*š**ú-iš-šá-kam-pa-an*, var. Uršakampaš, <sup>Δ</sup>*š**ur-šá-kam-pa-iš* (Haddock 1969: 771 = Old Persian \**Ršakanfa*-; Koch 1990: 412; Tavernier 2007: 395 sub 4.3.195; Old Persian \**Uššakanfa* Hinz 1975: 247).



- 6f.  $t\text{-}m\text{-}r\text{-}\lceil\text{š}^{\text{?}}\text{-}y^{\text{?}}\rceil\text{-}a$ , perhaps locative to  $*T\acute{a}^bmarš\bar{a}$  (or, better,  $*T\acute{a}^bmarš\acute{a}$ ), Elamite *Tammaršan* (Hallock 1969: 760; Koch 1990: 400, Tavernier 2007: 397 sub 4.3.211).
- 7f.  $k\text{-}a\text{-}r\text{-}i\text{-}\lceil k\text{-}t^{\text{?}}\rceil\text{-}[y\text{-}a]$ , perhaps locative to  $*Kar(a)ikta$ , attested as Elamite *Karikda* (Hallock 1969: 710; Vallat 1993: 131).
- 8-10. Perhaps to be restored <sup>8</sup>:  $a\text{-}t\text{-}r\text{-}a\text{-}i\text{-}[t^{\text{?}}]\text{-}^9[a\text{-}š]\text{-}\lceil i^{\text{?}}\rceil\text{-}y\text{-}5\text{-}v\text{-}r\text{-}d^{10}[n\text{-}a]$  =  $a^{\text{?}}tar\text{-}ait[\bar{a}š\acute{a}]iy\text{-}5\text{-}vrda[n\bar{a}]$ , ‘among these five villages of his<sup>?</sup>,’ corresponding to Elamite 5 *umanuš hatuma*, and cf. XPh<sub>p</sub> 30f. *antar aitā dahyāva*, corresponding to Elamite *hi šā-ma daiamā?* But if so, what is the referent of  $[-š\acute{a}]iy$ , ‘his’ – the possible title in line 4, or the possible personal name in line 10?
10. Perhaps  $x\text{-}š\text{-}i\text{-}t\text{-}\lceil h^{\text{?}}\rceil\text{-}[y\text{-}a]$ , *Xšaita[hyā]*, genitive of the personal name  $*Xšaita\text{-}$ , ‘shining, brilliant,’ represented in Elamite Šedda, etc. (Tavernier 2007: 359 sub 4.2.1970; cf. Avestan *xšaēta*-, Parthian PN *Xšet(-ak)* (*Hšyt(k)*) [Schmitt 1998: 184]).
12.  $\acute{a}vanādā$ , perhaps preverb *ava-* + unattested verb stem  $*nād\text{-}$ , hence 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular *avanādā<sup>t</sup>* or plural *avanādā<sup>n</sup>*, with erroneous long writing of morphologically short vowel in the final syllable. Kent 1953: 22 §53 cites similar orthographic departures in royal inscriptions; but Kent’s first and third examples, *avājanīyā* DB<sub>p</sub> I.51, 52 and *hamātaxšatā* DB<sub>p</sub> IV.92, are to be explained on morphological, not orthographic grounds (Schmitt 1991: 52, 74), the fifth example, *āhām* XPh 15f., in a notoriously erroneous text, is explained as a scribal error “ascribed to the underlying draft” (Schmitt 2000a: 452f.;



2000b: 90) and most of the remaining examples are from texts of Artaxerxes II and III, not persuasive parallels for this document.

13. *θarda*-, “year,” at the end of the text strongly suggests a date formula, but the form expected is *θardam* (accusative, as in *duvitiyāmca çitiyām θardam*, ‘in the second and third year,’ DB<sub>p</sub> V.3), or *θarda* (genitive, as in *hamahyāyā θarda*, ‘in one and the same year,’ DB<sub>p</sub> IV.4f., also IV.41, 45, 60). If the writer did not obey ordinary Old Persian orthographic rules and wrote [d-a] for /da/, not /dā/, then this may be the expected date formula, ‘[2]2<sup>nd</sup> year,’ and conversely, the surmise that this is a date formula is the strongest reason to postulate such a breach of the writing rules of the royal inscriptions. But on the more parsimonious assumption, that known rules apply, and if *θardā* is dual, ‘two years,’ then cf. PF 0756, 2 <sup>AŠ</sup>*bel kappatanna* ‘during two whole years’; PF-NN 2121, <sup>AŠ</sup>*bel 26-memanna akē* <sup>AŠ</sup>*bel 27-memanna* <sup>AŠ</sup>KI+MIN (= *bel*) 2 *hatuma*; PF 1970, PAP x *kurraḳa* <sup>AŠ</sup>*bel 3-na* PAP x *maḫḫika* <sup>AŠ</sup>KI+MIN (= *bel*) 3-na.
13. Word-divider at end of text: cf. DBa-DBf, DBi, DBj, DPd, DNb, DSk, DSL.

Particularly vexing, the verb that would indicate the nature of the transaction recorded – “give,” “receive,” “transport,” “dispense,” etc. – is not securely identifiable. For the moment, we are left with a bare framework of surmise: 6,000 or more liters (lines 1f.) of some dry commodity (lines 2f.), from a named person (lines 3f.), at 5 named villages (lines 4-10), for



two years or more (line 13), a transaction of modest scale.<sup>7</sup> This is enough to support the presumption that the text is an administrative record. In the absence of a reading of the commodity involved, recognition of a personal name, or identification of the seal on the tablet, it is not enough to confirm that the tablet is actually part of the Fortification archive (like the Greek administrative tablet) and not intrusive (like the Neo-Babylonian legal text).

Then what can we draw from the existence of this document? Two lines of surmise come to mind, a “tip of the iceberg view” and a “general literacy view.”

**Tip of the iceberg** – According to the first, it is possible that the Old Persian tablet is the sole evidence of a larger group of documents, and perhaps the sole indication of more widespread recording in Old Persian.<sup>8</sup> It is an administrative record, and administrative records with short-term utility do not function as isolates. They may be lost as they are discarded or they may be destroyed in their ordinary original use, but in their original use they only work as elements in more or less large files. In this view, the Old Persian tablet is intrusive in the main Fortification Archive, the trace of a file of such texts

<sup>7</sup> If for two years, 600+ liters/village/year, i.e. below subsistence rations for two persons per village.

<sup>8</sup> In a similar, hopeful vein: “As an exception there was found one piece – *perhaps there are more* – in Phrygian letters and language” (Anonymous 1934: 232, emphasis ours).





kept somewhere else at Persepolis, perhaps a large file, perhaps recording other concerns.

There is a close parallel for this situation. Before 1933, there was only one known Achaemenid Elamite administrative tablet, thought to be from Susa, MDP 11 308. When Scheil published it in 1911, nothing could be said of it except that it was Achaemenid (dated by the seal impression), that it was in Elamite, and that it was an administrative document. Only after the discovery and analysis of the Persepolis Fortification texts was it possible to understand the Susa tablet, and only then was it plausible to suggest that the tablet was evidence that the Achaemenid palace complex at Susa was the seat of an administrative and recording regime comparable to, and even linked with, the one at Persepolis (Garrison 1996). Taking a similar view of Achaemenid Elamite tablet fragments excavated at Old Kandahar (Helms 1982: 13; Sollberger *apud* Helms 1997: 101) and of other, unprovenienced Achaemenid Elamite tablets<sup>9</sup> makes it possible to suggest further, though

<sup>9</sup> Jones & Stolper 1986: 247-52; Grillett 1996; BM 108963, see Collon *apud* Merillees 2005: 81 and pl. XXXIV (edition in preparation). The Achaemenid Elamite administrative tablets in Freiburg, formerly in the collection of Dr. R. Schmidt (Vallat 1994; Keel & Uehlinger 1990: 26), and those at Yale and elsewhere, formerly in the Erlenmeyer collection (Jones & Stolper 2006) certainly came from Persepolis, “leaked” from the excavation of the Fortification Archive. Whether the Achaemenid Elamite administrative tablet found at Qaṣr-i Abu Naṣr only a few months after the discovery of the Persepolis Fortification Archive originated at Achaemenid Shiraz/Tirazziš or at Persepolis is a matter of disagreement; see



not to demonstrate, that Elamite administrative recording was frequently and widely used in Achaemenid Iran. It is at least possible to speculate that Persepolis Fort. 1208-101 is today what MDP 11 308 was in 1911, a trace of something larger, still to be found.<sup>10</sup>

**General literacy** – The find-spot of the Old Persian document, among the Fortification tablets, encourages a second line of surmise, that the Old Persian tablet was irregular but not intrusive. Like the Greek tablet, it is isolated evidence of exceptional behavior by an individual carrying out the ordinary business of the institution that kept the Fortification Archive. Unlike the Greek tablet, it represents an exceptional behavior that draws on indigenous language and technique.

All of the Persepolis Fortification texts, whether Elamite, Aramaic, or Greek, were written for administrators who spoke Iranian languages; most of them probably spoke a Persian

Henkelman, Jones & Stolper 2006, in favor of the Persepolis provenience. Even now, decades after the impact of the Persepolis Fortification Archive began to be felt on Achaemenid studies, and despite a thriving antiquities trade that might be expected to reflect this impact, Achaemenid Elamite administrative texts that are not from the Fortification archive are very rare; see Jones & Stolper [forthc. b].

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A remoter parallel may be sought in Roman Ghirshman's discovery of Proto-Elamite tablets at Tepe Sialk in 1938, at a time when Proto-Elamite was generally thought to be specific to Susa. The Sialk tablets were treated as anomalies until the 1970's, when Proto-Elamite tablets appeared at other sites across the breadth of Iran: first Tepe Yahya, then Tall-e Malyān and Shahr-e Sokhte.

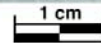


dialect, not the literary dialect (*Kunstsprache*) of the Old Persian inscriptions, but some corresponding colloquial (*Umgangssprache*, Schmitt 1993: 79). The Fortification texts were also written by scribes who spoke Iranian languages, even if they did not speak Persian as a first language (as the mixture of Iranian, Semitic and Elamite personal names among the few identified scribes and the occasional references to Babylonians or Persians processing documents suggest: Lewis 1994: 27f., and others). Whatever the social or political conditions of Cyrus's kingdom of Anšan, now under Darius called Pārsa, linguistic segregation of Persians from Elamites and others was not a possibility, least of all among the literate.

As for the use of written Aramaic, the Aramaic epigraphs on some of the Elamite cuneiform tablets (about a tenth of the edited sample) have the same implication that counterpart dockets on Assyrian and Babylonian tablets do, namely, that even if writing cuneiform and writing alphabetic texts were different specialties, nevertheless many of the people who read



PF 0855 upper edge



PF 0855 rev.

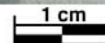


Fig. 10. Aramaic epigraph on Elamite  
Persepolis Fortification document



and wrote Elamite cuneiform texts, and most of those who filed them, were comfortable with Aramaic, and the converse was probably also true (Fig. 10).<sup>11</sup>

As for the Greek Fortification tablet, to understand it required no real knowledge of Greek language. The number *duo* is glossed with a numeral, 2; the unit of measure, *maris*, is transcribed from Persian; the month name, *Tebēt*, is Babylonian-Aramaic; even the word for the commodity, *oinos*, ‘wine,’ is a *Kulturwort*, perhaps recognizable to an Aramaic-speaker. To understand it required no great skills of language, only the skills of literacy.

As for the Persian tablet, literate personnel of the Fortification institution already knew Persian language. For people who were already literate in Elamite and Aramaic, neither Greek nor Old Persian writing would have been difficult. Models of Old Persian, equipped with Elamite counterparts, were visible as the first inscriptions of Darius went up at Persepolis and on his tomb at Naqsh-e Rostam. For a modern student, to learn the Old Persian script is a work of scarcely an hour. For a literate ancient speaker of the language, for whom the ambiguities left by the orthographic rules were not an obstacle, it would have been a work of minutes.

<sup>11</sup> Otherwise Lewis 1994: 28, “Despite the obvious amount of Aramaic ..., the linguistic barrier between it and Elamite is apparently too strong to produce much intermingling.” But in the same place: “But there are occasional texts which are almost fully bilingual.”





It is not necessary to adopt Walther Hinz's touching interpretation of the Fortification records of rations for Persian "boys" who were copying texts, that they refer to young Persian nobles dragged away from learning to ride, shoot and speak the truth and compelled to learn the unpopular new script with which Darius shaped the truth (PF 0871, PF 1137; PF-NN 1485, PF-NN 1588; see Hinz 1976, I: 32, but for an explanation closer to a present consensus, see Lewis 1994: 26 and Henkelman 2006: 278-80). Most scribes working around Persepolis *could* easily have written the Old Persian tablet.

This evades the essential question: Why *did* one scribe write Old Persian? If it was easy to do, the text might be no more than a sport or diversion, stimulated by the appearance of the first Old Persian inscriptions at Persepolis. But what was easy for one scribe was easy for others. If one scribe took this option, it was available to others if the practical use of Old Persian recording was being propagated, or was expected to be propagated.

**Conclusion** – There is no obvious way to pursue this question with only one imperfectly understood document. It is possible that more Persian tablets are to be found in the unedited balance of the Fortification find, but the likelihood of that is small, since examining about two-thirds of the tablet boxes has so far yielded only this one Old Persian document.<sup>12</sup>

12

Hallock drew tablets and fragments edited in the PF and PF-NN series from about



As matters stand, it seems more parsimonious to take this tablet as the product of extraordinary behavior than as evidence of widespread practice. Nevertheless, it reinforces the fact that the Persepolis Fortification Archive, like many of the great archives of the earlier Near East – Mari, Hattusa, Nineveh – represents the simultaneous use of several languages and interference among them. The oddity of this case, almost an irony, is that it brings evidence of the rulers' language in ordinary written use in the homeland of the rulers.

Ethnicity, and language as one of the expressions of ethnicity,<sup>13</sup> were important social markers in the Achaemenid Empire in general and the Achaemenid court in particular. In a palace where the display inscriptions present the rulers as multilingual, it was inevitable that the literate class was multilingual, enough so to write the language of the rulers for occasional purposes other than display.

1,100 of the 2,350 boxes. Bowman drew tablets and fragments from many of these, and from about 40 others. Hallock and other member of the pre-World War II team working on the tablets also drew tablets and fragments from these boxes and others for photographers making pictures of seal impressions in a project sponsored by the Federal Works Projects Administration (WPA), 1940-42. As of April 2007, Stolper has re-examined many of these boxes, and about 360 others. Hence, at least 1,500 of the boxes have been examined in ways that would have been likely to identify other Old Persian tablets, or other unusual tablets.

**13** Thus OP *vispažana-*, *paruv žana-*, '(lands) with all sorts of people,' corresponding to Babyl. *ša naphar lišānu gabbi*, see Stolper 1984: 299 with references, and especially Tavernier [forthc.].



By way of uncomfortably vague conclusion, we may endorse David Lewis's remark on the Phrygian and Greek Fortification tablets:

This makes Persepolis administration a complex linguistic phenomenon, even at the level of script. At the level of speech ... the position will have been even worse ... This was a situation which faced Persepolis scribes and officials every day; no doubt they were better at it (1994: 21f.).<sup>14</sup>

But we may also put this observation on a different footing. The Persepolis Fortification Archive reflects interplay among several streams of information. The streams followed related but not identical practices, both in written form (hence the Elamite and Aramaic tablets) and in non-written form (hence the uninscribed, sealed tablets, and the references to supplementary and oral information in the Elamite texts). They also allowed some surprising latitude in practices (hence the Greek and Old Persian tablets). As work on the Aramaic and uninscribed Fortification tablets proceeds, the complexities of this interplay will become increasingly apparent, even if comprehension of those complexities does not develop equally rapidly.

What is essential to even the possibility of perceiving such ancient complexity in realistic terms is the integrity of the

<sup>14</sup> Likewise Brixhe's uncertainty over the Phrygian "economic" tablet: "Reste à se demander ce que vient faire en ce contexte un document rédigé en phrygien" (2004: 126).



excavated Fortification tablet find. Without this precise archaeological, chronological, geographical, institutional and historical context, the Old Persian tablet would be not merely hard to understand as an Iranian text, it would be hard to use



Fort. 1771 lower edge

as a historical datum of any kind. Even its authenticity would be at least questioned, perhaps rejected. The Greek Fortification



Fig. 11. Greek administrative tablet from the Persepolis Fortification (Fort. 1771).  
Counterclockwise from above: "lunate" sigma, line 3; four-bar sigma in OINOΣ, line 2;  
"lunate" sigma in ΜΑΠΙΣ, line 3.

tablet would surely be subject to the same peril on account of its epigraphic oddity<sup>15</sup> and in spite of the fact that the use of

<sup>15</sup> That is, the apparent occurrence of both a four-bar sigma and a chronologically surprising lunate sigma (Balcer 1979: 280). Lewis (1979: 13 fn. 55) and Schmitt (1989: 304), are correct in explaining the lunate appearance of the second sigma as





PFS 0041 vouches for the document now, just as it did on the day it was applied. The integrity of the archival context makes it possible to assert the authenticity of these exceptional documents. It also makes it possible to draw on the mass of Elamite data – in this case, oddly, the better documented and better understood term of comparison – to interpret them.

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an effect produced by the difficulty of writing on the curved point of the tablet. On closer examination, the letter is not so “unmistakably lunate” (Lewis); four distinct strokes are recognizable ([Fig. 11](#)).



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